

Governor Albert H. Roberts Law Office
114 E. Main Street (SW cor. Main and Goodpasture Sts.)
Livingston
Overton County
Tennessee

HABS No. TN-218

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GOVERNOR ALBERT H. ROBERTS LAW OFFICE

HABS No. TN-218

Location: 114 E. Main Street, at the southwest corner of Main and Goodpasture Streets, Livingston, Overton County, Tennessee.

Present Owners: Betty Q. Johnson and Helen Qualles, 526 Spruce Street, Livingston, Tennessee.

Present Occupant: Vacant.

Significance: The law office of Governor Albert H. Roberts is a well preserved example of a late 19th century country town professional office building. The elaborate wood detail and millwork evidence the first imported building materials from the shops of nearby cities made possible by the extension of railroad lines. The scale and form are indicative of the first urban fabric of late 19th century rural towns of America.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: c. 1885
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and Subsequent Owners:

Legal Description: A 40' x 15' lot with building situated on the southwest corner of E. Main and Goodpasture Streets, facing on E. Main 15 feet, in the 6th C.D. of Overton County, in the corporate limits of the city of Livingston, in the state of Tennessee.

The following is a complete chain of title: (all Overton County Deed Book References)

Bk. U. p. 35, 12/19/1871

W.N.A. Winningham and David Graham to A.F. Capps for \$125.00. "The haus and ground on which it stands in said town known as the Winningham grocery haus.. being the same property on which said Graham has a deed of Trust from said Winningham." Sold at a sheriff's sale. Recorded 3/15/1872.

Bk. V, p. 490, 9/12/1878

A.F. Capps to John M.D. Mitchell, for \$100. "My office and the grounds upon which it stands in the town of Livingston...situated on the principal street of said town and in front of the residence of W.W. Goodpasture." Recorded 9/12/1878.

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Bk. W. p. 171, 6/8/1880 (deed for the house and property surrounding the law office)

J.G. Whitney and wife to W.W. Goodpasture, for "valuable consideration", "including the dwelling house where we now live, bounded by store house of W.W. Goodpasture and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church." Conveyed to Whitney by W.W. Harris and wife. Recorded 1/10/1882.

Bk. AJ, p. 456, 10/21/1902

B.L. Speck and wife and J.R. Mitchell, et al, children of Winburn Mitchell, deceased, to W.W. Goodpasture for \$100. "The southeast corner of the town lot where said Goodpasture now lives and known as the Justice M.D. Mitchell law officehouse..including the house now standing on the said lot being the house once occupied by Dock McGee as a printing office." Recorded 7/7/1903.

Bk. AM, p. 470, 12/5/1902 (deed to adjoining property)

Methodist Church South and Cumberland Presbyterian Church to W.W. Goodpasture, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church lot, conveyed to the church many years ago by S.H. Capps for \$75. Recorded 8/27/1907.

Bk. AN, p. 161, 7/9/1907

E.C. Goodpasture et al heirs of W.W. Goodpasture, deceased, to A.G. Keisling and E.A. Qualles for \$2005. (All the property conveyed in previous three deeds).

Bk. AN, p. 73, 2/24/1908

A.G. Keisling to E.A. Qualles (his 1/2 interest) for \$1100. Recorded 3/18/1908.

Bk. AS, p. 480, 1/15/1913

Elvin A. Qualles and Clara P. Qualles to Albert B. Qualles for \$2350. "A 1/2 interest is retained and accepted in law office and ground on which same stands being the southeast corner of said lot." Recorded 7/24/1913.

Bk. 142, p. 342, 2/12/1971

Settlement of estates of Dr. A.B. Qualles and Clara R. Qualles, to Dr. Donald M. Qualles and Betty Qualles Johnson equally as "tenants in common." "Included in the above description is a one-half interest in law office and ground upon which same stands, same being on south east corner of said lot."

4. Alterations and additions: A teller's booth was added to the rear of the building when Mrs. Clara Richie Qualles, wife of Dr. A.B. Qualles, had office there during her two terms as County Trustee during the 1930s. Concrete porch and brick bases to columns as well as linoleum floor and wall paneling were added in the early 1960s.

- B. Historical Context: Livingston was established as a political center of a county rather removed from the mainstreams of transportation and communication. Its early economic base characterized it as a farm and stock town. It was located on a major drove trail between Danville, Kentucky and Huntsville, Alabama. First Mondays were always trading days. Until 1908 when the railroad finally came there, goods had to be hauled in from the nearest depot. The main centers of enterprise consisted of the town's several general stores.

Other early commercial structures were located on the same site as the present law office. An 1871 deed reveals the presence of the Winningham Grocery Haus. The "haus" refers to the large numbers of German and Swiss immigrants in this section of the country after the Civil War. In 1878 John M.D. Mitchell bought the property and within a few years the present structure was built. Little is known of Mitchell but during his ownership the building was continuously referred to as a law office house. It remained a law office for many years. Elvin A. Qualles had a law practice there after it was purchased by his brother Dr. A.B. Qualles, for a physician's office in 1913. In the 1930s Dr. Qualles's wife built a teller's booth on the rear portion of the building as a country trustee's office. In later years E.A. Qualles became more involved in farming and only used the office as a place to shelve his books.

Albert H. Roberts, Governor of Tennessee from 1919-1922, never owned the office building but did rent it from about the turn of the century to 1913. Born near Alpine, Tennessee in 1868, Roberts was the son of John A. and Sarah E. Carlock Roberts. He was an 1889 graduate of Hiwassee College in Madisonville, Tennessee, and taught school at the Alpine Institute for five years. He was Overton County Superintendent of Schools from 1896 to 1901. He practiced law in the first and most of the second decade of the 20th century. From 1910 to 1918 he was the Chancellor of the 4th District of Tennessee. From 1919 to 1922 he was Governor of Tennessee. While Governor he organized the State Highway Department, reorganized the State Tax System, and signed the Women's Suffrage Bill. Afterwards he moved to Donelson, Tennessee while maintaining a law practice in Nashville for several years. He died in 1946.

The Good Roads Project initiated in Tennessee by Governor Roberts was the first major attempt by the state to improve its roads on a state-wide basis. With the popularity and increasing numbers of automobiles such steps were inevitable of course, but until this point most of Tennessee's roads were little more than improved stage routes which had in turn been little more than Indian or buffalo trails.

Perhaps the most notable event for which Governor Roberts should be remembered is that he was the man who made women's suffrage in the United States a reality. Tennessee was the state which gave the 19th Amendment the ratification of the 3/4 of the states needed to adopt the amendment and Roberts was the Governor who signed the bill.

Among the well publicized events of Roberts's administration was the marriage of Alvin C. York, famed World War I hero, performed by Governor Roberts and whose wedding reception was one of the most notable ever held at the Governor's mansion.

Governor Roberts's fate, like his history, was very much like that of another progressive Democrat, Woodrow Wilson. Both men rode the tides of idealism, were defeated by a "return to normalcy" and were removed from office in the 1921 elections. It was a period when leaders came from small county towns, and the law office of Governor Albert H. Roberts reveals to us the history of this time, place, and man.

Miss Will Harris was secretary to Albert H. Roberts in his law office from 1909 till about 1917. She left him for the employ of Cordell Hull and accompanied him to Washington. She was his personal secretary as long as he lived and during the World War II years when he was Secretary of State to President Roosevelt.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The one-story rectangular building measures approximately 39' x 15'. The front facade is two bays wide and three bays deep.
2. Foundation: Stone pier foundation covered with tin sheets.
3. Walls: Horizontal clapboards. Front gable end has wooden shingles in alternate rows laid with staggered butts.
4. Structural system, framing: Frame construction with stud frame truss for the gable roof.
5. Porch: The front is sheltered by a porch with turned columns and millwork.
6. Chimney: (Not recorded).

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The entrance door is of a single door-and-transom kind. The top half of the door is glazed; the lower half is paneled. The transom is rectangular enclosed with clear glass.
- b. Windows: The windows are one-over-one double-hung wood sash. The lower sections are stained glass; the upper sections are frosted glass. They are all topped with wood hoods.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof with standing seam metal covering.
- b. Cornice: The cornice is a simple board topped with a molding. The rake of the gable end cornice is likewise covered with a molding.

B. Description of Interior:

(Not surveyed. See HABS photo TN-218-6 for a general view of the interior).

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Early Views: Old ca. 1910 photo showing A.H. Roberts, Miss Will Harris, his secretary, and Elvin A. Qualles in front of the office building. (Place and address of repository not given).

B. Interviews:

Robert L. Eldridge, 207 E. University Street, Livingston, Tennessee, for research and assistance.

Helen Qualles, 516 Spruce Street, Livingston, Tennessee. Daughter of Elvin A. Qualles.

Mrs. Alta Owen Keisling, 606 N. Goodpasture Street, Livingston, Tennessee. Housekeeper to Governor Albert H. Roberts 1913 to 1931.

Prepared by: Joseph L. Herndon
HABS Historian
Historic American Buildings Survey
September 1974.

Susan McCown
HABS Architectural Historian
Historic American Buildings Survey
Spring 1986

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This 1974 project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Tennessee Historical Commission and the East Tennessee Historical Society. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, Joseph L. Herndon, HABS Historian, prepared the paper.

Susan McCown, HABS Architectural Historian in the Washington, D.C. office, reviewed and edited the paper in the Spring of 1986, for transmittal to the Library of Congress. The photographs of the law office building were taken February 1983 by Jack E. Boucher, HABS Staff Photographer.